

## **Istook Questions New Train's Cost to Taxpayers**

*Washington, D.C.* -- Today, Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) responded to the release of Amtrak's latest official figures on the cost of the new Oklahoma-to-Texas train service. The service is so costly that taxpayers could save money if the government instead supplied each passenger their own private limousine and chauffeur to make the trip. As well as cheaper, the limos also would be a quicker way to travel.

**"Amtrak service is a costly gamble," Istook said. "There's a lot riding on these rails—namely our tax money. State and federal government are spending \$25-million on the new Amtrak service in Oklahoma; Amtrak's own figures show that each passenger on the new route is expected to cost the taxpayers \$228. Nationally, Amtrak already costs taxpayers hundreds of millions each year. Is this the best use of our tax money?"**

Amtrak's latest official figures show it's impossible to operate the new line except at a loss—which taxpayers pay. The national average is that it costs taxpayers \$47 for each trip a passenger takes. On the new route, passenger fares (\$24 one-way) will cover only 10% of the cost. The other 90% is paid by a direct subsidy from taxpayers' money. Amtrak's contract with the State of Oklahoma projects 23,000 passengers the first year, charging taxpayers \$5,247,000 for this. That's an average of 63 riders per day, costing taxpayers \$14,000 per day--\$228 per passenger (\$456 round-trip).

On top of this, taxpayers are spending several million dollars more to upgrade the tracks and to fix and re-open the old railroad depots.

Calls to Oklahoma City limousine services reveal they'll pick you up at your front door and drive you to Fort Worth both cheaper and quicker--an hour or more faster than the train. For \$450 round-trip—less than the subsidy for one Amtrak passenger--they'll also drive you around while you're in Texas. And you can bring five friends—at no extra charge.

On the new route, Amtrak figures the daily passenger load will drop after the initial surge of novelty riders, but more riders wouldn't fix the problem anyway. To meet expenses would require ten times the passengers that are expected. Instead of the projected 63 average daily passengers, it would require over 600 passengers per day before ticket sales would cover the current costs. But that's impossible, because the new train only has room to carry 288 passengers per day (144 each way). Adding more cars for more seats also means higher costs. Amtrak is so expensive that it cannot operate without either a taxpayer subsidy, or much higher ticket prices.

Said Istook, **"Users pay fuel and ticket taxes to use highways and airports. Amtrak riders should pay their own way with their ticket prices, not be subsidized by taxpayers."**